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BACKGROUND--AFGHANISTAN:
DEVELOPMENT OF PERSIAN GULF PORT

I. Development of the Persian Gulp port of Chahbajar (a natural harbor, a few miles within Iran near western border of Pakistan) offers a possible alternative to present dilemma of Afghan trade routes.

A. Afghans are presently favoring trans-USSR routes over traditional trans-Pakistan route (see map) which is subject to interruption at whim of Pak Gov't.

B. Although natural harbor probably could be developed without great difficulty, another factor is that present 400-mile road through Western Iran to Afghan border is little better than caravan trail, would need substantial engineering.

II. However, such development would definitely serve interests of Iran, both in terms of aiding economic progress of its West and by providing good route for marketing of Iranian POL in Afghanistan.

A. Advantages for Afghanistan, in addition to providing possible alternative to either trans-USSR or Trans-Pakistan trade routes, would be:

1. Access to Iranian (as opposed to Soviet) POL.
2. A direct route to Helmand Valley development area, Afghanistan's major area of economic development.

III. Although US strategic interests would be well served by nothing more than Afghan acceptance of the Chahbahar alternative (with a consequent diminishment in Afghan dependence on Soviet trade routes and POL), this port could also serve as a valuable adjunct to MEDO facilities in the area.

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